

Suggested Remarks
For Mission Director Jon D. Lindborg
"Books for Asia" Turnover Ceremony
City Gym, City Hall Compound
Surigao City
January 31, 2007, 10:00 a.m.

The Honorable Robert Lyndon Barbers,
Governor of the Province of Surigao del
Norte;

The Honorable Alfonso Casurra, Mayor of
Surigao City;

Dr. Steven Rood, Country Representative, The
Asia Foundation to the Philippines;

Parents, Teachers, and Students;

Distinguished Guests, Friends, Ladies and
Gentlemen:

Good morning.

I am honored to participate today in this
book turnover ceremony. It celebrates our
partnerships and affirm our mutual
commitment to improving educational
opportunities for children and young

scholars here in Surigao City and in the provinces of Surigao del Norte and the Dinagat Islands.

I am particularly glad because this is my first visit to the great city of Surigao and the Province of Surigao del Norte. While I only just arrived here this morning, I understand that Surigao del Norte is particularly well known for its three "S's - shrimp, suman (rice cakes), and surfing. While I like shrimp and suman just fine, I am particularly partial to the third "S" - surfing. My home in the United States is the Hawaiian island of Maui, where I am out wind surfing whenever I get the chance. I hear that the waters off Surigao have the wind and surf to match. But we are here to

celebrate education, so surfing will have to wait until another day.

The history of U.S. Government support for education in the Philippines actually dates back more than 100 years, to the early 20th century, when American volunteer school teachers, who came to be known as "Thomasites," arrived in Manila to help establish the public school system of the Philippines. Today's ceremonial turnover of books affirms and continues the long tradition of cooperation among Americans, residents here in northern Mindanao, and all Filipinos to ensure that children and young scholars have access to education.

The Asia Foundation's "Books for Asia" Program has made a particularly important contribution in this regard, helping with this book turnover today to put 25,000 books into the hands of students and others in some 500 educational institutions here in Surigao City and the provinces of Surigao Del Norte and Dinagat Islands. USAID's Education Quality and Access for Learning and Livelihood Skills (EQuALLS) Program also has mounted a significant effort to bring books to students throughout the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), as well as Regions IX and XII. Together, these programs supported by USAID have brought more than 1.1 million books to Mindanao since 2003.

USAID supports the "Books for Mindanao" component of the "Books for Asia" Program and the EQuALLS Project because we recognize the great need for educational materials here in Mindanao. By providing a full range of books and other reading materials for all levels of students -- from elementary school students to those attending university -- these programs provide students with the most essential tools to learn. "Books for Asia" and EQuALLS help strengthen learning and reading skills, particularly English. And fairly or not, English fluency is especially important to be able to compete effectively in today's global economy.

Of course, education is about more than improving living standards. It is also

about equipping people with the skills to be good citizens - to be able to work constructively with others to forge free, just, and democratic societies, which form the basis for lasting peace. A foundation for peace has already been established here in Mindanao, but there is still work to be done. Stronger social and political institutions must be created to help sustain and nurture peace and ensure the equitable distribution of the benefits of economic progress. These strong institutions can emerge only through the efforts to committed and responsible citizens, and here too education is central.

In the areas of democratic participation, institution building, and governance,

however, Surigao is leading the way. In this connection, I want to take a moment to honor another aspect of the partnership between the American people and Surigao City - and that is through our work under the Transparent and Accountable Governance (TAG) Project. With the steadfast commitment to reform of Mayor Casurra and his city government staff and the TAG Project's help, Surigao City has made great strides in improving governance and democratic participation. Under TAG, the record shows that Surigao has been a leader in improving city government services, reducing corruption, and mobilizing the business and NGO communities to participate in the reform process. We commend your progress, admire

your commitment and are very proud to work in partnership with you.

USAID is also very pleased to be partners with The Asia Foundation in both the TAG and Books for Mindanao programs, along with the publishers in the United States who have generously donated their books, with local governments, such as Surigao City, and with the schools, teachers, and parent-teacher associations at the grass roots.

Finally, I thank Mayor Casurra, and his staff for graciously hosting this important event today. The U.S. Government and the American people are proud to work with committed local governments, like Surigao city and the provinces of Surigao del Norte

and the Dinagat Islands, schools and communities across Mindanao to help give children the education that they need and deserve.

Thank you and good morning.